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INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0303
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0210
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1197
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TAGS: [SMIG](#) [PREF](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: RUDD CONFIDENT ON ASYLUM SEEKER ISSUE

REF: A. A. CANBERRA 255
[1](#)B. B. CANBERRA 807
[1](#)C. C. CANBERRA 945

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Prime Minister Rudd is displaying increased confidence on the issue of asylum seekers, as the surge in boats continues. Rudd is attacking the previous government's tough policies while emphasizing his government's more humane approach. This action follows internal criticism of his tough rhetoric on the issue, and the remarks of one Opposition MP linking asylum seekers to terrorism. End Summary.

Rudd on the offensive

[1](#)2. (SBU) Rudd on October 22 attacked the Opposition on the asylum seeker issue, sparked by a Liberal MP claiming "narrow odds" of terrorists being on vessels carrying asylum seekers. Rudd angrily rejected this, labeling the Liberal party as the party of "kids behind razor wire," wrongful detentions and "fear and smear." He called on Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull to "show some leadership" by withdrawing support for the MP's preselection. Prior to this, there were concerns Rudd's consistently tough rhetoric on the issue risked demonizing asylum seekers. For example, Labor MP Michael Danby declared he preferred the less hard-line rhetoric of Immigration Minister Chris Evans.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: Previously, Rudd had been extremely cautious on the border protection issue, mindful of the problems Labor had in 2001. However, rather than being on the defensive--e.g. pointing out that asylum seekers undergo security checks--Rudd decided to attack. Politically, this is clever on several fronts. Firstly, it addresses internal concerns about his approach. Secondly, it puts more pressure on Turnbull's beleaguered leadership. And thirdly, Rudd is leveraging his popularity, and the power of government, to encourage a more nuanced and compassionate debate of the asylum seeker issue, which will help Labor long-term. End Comment.

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